



IMANKALYAN LAHIRI

**PEACE,
DEVELOPMENT
and COMMUNITY**

9 BHA/U
2258

The Look East Imagination of India with
Special Reference to North East India

CONTENTS

Preface	vii
Abbreviations	xi
1. Look East Policy and Northeast India: Prospects and Challenges	1
2. From “Look East” to “Act East”: A Critical Analysis of India’s Look East Policy	45
3. Myanmar: India’s Gateway to Southeast Asia— A Case Study of Moreh-Tamu Border Trade: Transforming Connectivity?	71
4. Tourism and Northeast India: Enhancing Connectivity and Regional Integration Process	101
5. Conclusion	127
Bibliography	147

LOOK EAST POLICY AND NORTHEAST INDIA: PROSPECTS AND CHALLENGES

Introduction

One of the major features of India's foreign policy today is its "Look East Policy." The Northeastern part of India is the major region of the Indian nation without which it will be difficult for Indian Foreign Policymakers to initiate India's Look East Policy.

Geographically, Northeast India is located in a corner of the Indian nation and has common borders with four neighbouring countries of India: China in the North, Bhutan in the West and Bangladesh and Myanmar in the East and South respectively. No other part of India has such a strategic position as the northeast. Over countless decades, insurgency or militancy as a terrible problem has plagued most parts of Northeast India, and the problem has remained unresolved till today. In many cases the insurgents have multiplied and are still mushrooming, which has resulted in numerous deaths and loss of lives, including those of the rebels, the police, the paramilitary forces as well as innocent lives caught in the crossfire, thereby disturbing normal life in many places in Northeast India. Many indicate that New Delhi is too far off to be even aware of the ground realities, while life in Northeast India is crippled with fear, anxiousness, and uncertainty among common people, the farmers and the traders, with the administration caught in the web of a shadow play. Along with that one of the major developments in the region is that, in 1998, Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) was passed by the Government of India in the seven states of Northeast

India, and in Jammu and Kashmir. The Act gives enormous power to the Army Officers who have permissible immunity for their activities. In other words, no prosecution, suit or any other legal proceeding against anyone acting under this law can be broached. So, alternatively, scholars and practitioners are of the opinion that AFSPA allows the Indian Army to terrorise the stakeholders of the states of India where it is operational. As a result AFSPA as a law has given rise to secessionist sentiments in many regions of Northeast India.

Many of the stakeholders in Northeast India believe that it is necessary to abolish AFSPA, so that the people of the region could enjoy democratic rights like other citizens of India. Not only are insurgency and militancy creating disturbances in the region, there are many other events that have been troubling the region for many years. The stakeholders, government, NGOs, students and many other groups are doing their best to establish peace in the region for the last many years. Given the situation that Northeast India is experiencing directly, it is hard to believe that public security, development and community building in Northeast India will be forthcoming in the near future. The Indian government, however, realised the reality and launched its Look East Policy by including Northeast India within the compass of India's Foreign Policy. Initially, the importance of Northeast India as a region was not considered, but with the modification in India's domestic and Foreign Policy, and due to recent developments in the Asian regional order, or rather, due to the rise of *Asian Regionalism*, Indian foreign policymakers want to pay due care to Northeast India, while framing the design for its Look East Policy initiatives. This is more or less evident from the initiatives taken by the Indian government in recent years. However, there are several other problems that exist in the process. It is important for the Indian government to take the people of Northeast India into confidence and some sort of faith must be established towards them. The aim of this project work is to analyse India's Look East Policy in recent years and to link it with India's northeastern region and to find

an answer as to whether the Look East Policy could bring peace and development in the Northeastern Region of India in real conditions. This will be followed by an analysis of how India's Look East Policy could help in the community development process in northeastern India.

The new geopolitical ideas developed by contemporary strategic thinkers working in the field of present research and developing the framework of innovative policy understanding, developed an area that simply refuses to remain confined by the present geography of Northeast India and wishes to sway to the countries of Southeast Asia, Asia-Pacific and South Asia through such frontier states as Myanmar, China and Bangladesh by crossing the international borders. The whole of the Northeast as formally conceived now has therefore a significant effect in the field of present research, and also provides a significant influence to the alternative models of imagining the Northeast in the contemporary understanding of India's domestic and International policies. It is to be noted here that Northeast India is the geographical space between two subregions of Asia, namely, South Asia and Southeast Asia. Both these regions are in the process of change, set off by economic rise and the process of evolution. However, for many reasons, we in India have failed to attract the various opportunities that this subregion of India has to offer towards the welfare and the well-being of the people. It is significant again to understand the region, not merely as the geographical component of being a bridgehead between South Asia and Southeast Asia, but also as the storehouse of natural and human resources. Today, the challenge is to grasp these opportunities to make certain that growth and development do not ignore this region, but involve the region at large.

Situating the Northeastern Region of India

Historically, the geopolitical segregation of the northeastern region took place during the partition of India in 1947. Undoubtedly, the partition

created chaos and that chaos had a negative impact on the development of the Northeast. It made the Northeast the most controlled and susceptible border region, and the most exposed territory. The partition caused the closing of the inland water and railway communications in the region through what is now Bangladesh (East Pakistan, after partition). For example, the access to the Chittagong seaport was lost after the separation of India, which created several problems for Northeast India. Calcutta (now Kolkata) became the nearest port, several hundred kilometres away from the region. Agartala, which was only 350 kilometres from Calcutta through Dacca (now Dhaka), shifted to nearly 1,600 kilometres away. Moreover, Chinese occupation of Tibet and the blockage of the border of India with Burma added more isolation of the area. This blockage shattered this region economically.¹

On the positive side, people from different sectors have talked about economic integration of the northeastern states with mainland India for several decades after partition. For many years, policymakers, bureaucrats and intellectuals have tried to stop the numerous armed separatist struggles that caused political instability in the northeastern states. They concentrated on improving the region's underdeveloped and weak economic condition and felt the urgency to integrate Northeast India with mainland India to work out these troubles and to establish peace in the region. As a component of this attempt to incorporate the region with the rest of India, the government of India started to sanction sufficient funds and emphasis was laid on the growth and infrastructural development in the area. Despite this, the region is still severely underdeveloped and still lives under threat and suspicion. Illegal migrants from Bangladesh, Nepal and Myanmar have added tensions in the area. Altogether, these factors are creating unrest in the area and such unrest has resulted in anxiety, which threatens the protection of the region by hindering the progress and development of a strategically significant part of India. Moreover, the entire neighbourhood of Northeast India is poor in industrial development, and there is no

specific industrial policy both on the part of the government and the individual investors in the region, which leads to the increase in the costs of transportation of goods. Major industrial groups are also apathetic toward investment in the region, even though many of them are very much operative in the region in terms of research and observation. Thus, the existing policies of development of the northeastern region needed to be reshaped if the stated objectives have to be met in the years to come.²

It is known to all of us that the defining feature of India is “Unity in Diversity.” It is comfortably known to us that each and every part of India respects this attribute along with a strong underlying sense of national unity and *Indianness* at the centre of this diversity. Also, a former Minister of State of Indian Union Ministry of External Affairs once defined the multicultural feature of India as “Diversity in Unity.”³ This rich mixture of diversity can be more significantly observed in the northeastern provinces of India. It is important to note here that Northeast India is naturally rich in resources and nature has presented this entire region abundantly in many respects. To mention a few, the region has a rich biodiversity; unparalleled potential to develop hydro-energy, has reserves of petroleum and natural gas, is rich in minerals and likewise has huge timber resources. But, more importantly, it is the people of the area, which is a unique endowment, being a consequence of the merging of diverse cultural, lingual, spiritual, ethnic and educational patterns.⁴ It is now time to cultivate the human resources of Northeast India along with the other natural resources. It is necessary to generate the idea amongst the people of the northeastern region that they form an integral part of India and their role in defining India’s feature of “Unity in Diversity” is important since India’s rise in the age of globalisation would be incomplete without their participation and cooperation.

In spite of having tremendous natural and human resources, as pointed out earlier, the region is largely underdeveloped. The process

of industrialisation was initiated in this area by the East India Company under the British rule in the early nineteenth century with the nurturing and the first export of tea way back in 1839, but the speedy increase of manufacture has not taken place. Though coal was found here, it was destroyed by the colonial rulers. Coal was primarily used for the running of the railroad. During this time the policy of coal preservation was not followed. In the year 1901, the first oil refinery in Asia was set up in Digboi following the discovery of oil in Upper Assam. Along with oil, tea and jute industries started to grow to some extent. It is significant to recall that during times of severe foreign exchange crisis in the past, Assam's tea and jute exports remained one of the major sources of earning foreign exchange. It is all the more ironic and disheartening that today this region is yet to derive full benefit from the industrialisation and economic evolution of our nation, and that significant conflicts are evident in terms of development indicators compared to other regions of India. For example, if we take the case study of Assam we will get the real picture of the situation. Assam is often described as a *land of poverty in the midst of plenty*, it is also described as a region of neglected potentialities and unrealised opportunities. There are vast resources of minerals, oil, natural gas, coal, limestone, forests, and water resources holding out prospects of rapid industrialisation in Assam. In spite of this, Assam happens to be one of the most backward states in India in terms of industrial development. Major industries in the Indian public sector are mostly built by the Government of India. Private enterprises and the Union government have shown no interest in the industrialisation of Assam, instead coveting its raw material. The Union government has made about twenty per cent of its investment in Maharashtra and Gujerat as compared to only five per cent in this region. There are many factors for the underdevelopment of Assam. Industrialisation is handicapped mainly by Assam's isolation from the rest of India along with a poor transportation system, small local markets, the lack of sufficient capital and entrepreneurs, the structural

weakness of Assam's economy, the Government of India's reluctance in licensing industries in Assam, and finally, the non-Assamese control of its trade, commerce and industry.⁵ It may be mentioned here that tea is the main agricultural product in Assam. Before Assam's reorganisation in 1972, there were seven hundred fifty-two tea gardens, while the number now is nearly nine hundred. Assam today is producing nearly sixty per cent of the country's tea. Assam's tea is earning huge foreign exchange, but, surprisingly, the financial benefits go to non-Assamese people. This is so for several reasons. First, these tea estates are not owned by the Assamese. Secondly, the bulk of tea output is sold and distributed in Kolkata by a system of auctions that bring no substantial benefit to the state. Since the major portion of Assam tea is marketed not at the Guwahati Auction Centre but at the Kolkata Centre, it is the West Bengal government that receives most of the revenue by way of sales tax on Assam produced tea. The royalties received by West Bengal from the Government of India for Assamese tea are more than what is received by Assam. Moreover, the head offices of the tea industry, such as the Indian Tea Association, are located in Kolkata, thus providing job opportunities to the people of West Bengal. On the other hand, Assam also produces about forty per cent of India's jute, but has only one jute mill in the cooperative sector, which is The Assam Cooperative Jute Mills Ltd. which is located at Silghat, in the Nagaon district of Assam. This jute mill was registered in the year 1959 under the Assam Cooperative Societies Act. It is impossible to process all the raw jute by this single mill, so almost all the raw jute goes to feed the mills in Kolkata.⁶ There are, however, some private jute mills in Assam, but their potential output is negligible.

Similar problems remain for all the other states of Northeast India. There is a widening gap between the rich and the poor in many of the states. Connectivity in the region is poor and so it is unmanageable for any industry to grow. Sometimes connectivity between the urban fields and the rural areas of the region is lost. It is also true that, since

independence, Indian business houses have ignored the region greatly and have not initiated any major industry plan, as pointed out earlier.

Today, the Northeast is in the process of reviving the past. The global emerging market economy has created a consciousness among the stakeholders in the area. In the normal course, it is anticipated that the consciousness would soon take a proper shape. Indian business talent would find newer dimensions in the region. As discussed above, there was a time when mainland entrepreneurs were not very welcome in these uninitiated lands. The reasons were many, and they will be discussed in due course. Even so, that posture is shifting in recent years. New articulation from different sectors is taking different directions. At the same time it is anticipated that with the process of investment “the region’s geopolitical isolation” may be broken and then neutralised. Nevertheless, the question remains: how far could the local economic system cope with equal and sustainable purchasing power and supply the necessary human resources for such developmental operations which might grow in the age of globalisation? The result would decide the destiny of the entire region. On the other hand, if the cognitive operation of investment demands a good shape in the region, it has to be created on a positive approach. There have to be inputs from diverse but interrelated fields, including defence, foreign insurance, national security and foreign craft which have to be absorbed carefully. The substantial positive sign is that a foundation has been built and the Government of India is seriously thinking of this. This is clear from the different initiatives that the government has adopted in recent years.

There has been growing realisation by the Indian leaders and bureaucrats that development of physical connectivity with Southeast Asia (and also with Asia-Pacific Region) is an important condition to fully utilise the opportunities intended to be offered by India’s Look East Policy. In the initiatives to frame the Look East Policy relevant for the region, India has placed greater stress on enhancing connectivity

through all the potential modes of infrastructure development, such as land, air and water routes, energy infrastructure development both in the study of hydroelectric, hydrocarbon and telecommunication linkages. As a consequence, India has initiated some bilateral projects and multilateral projects, aimed at increasing the connectivity between the Northeast, Southeast Asia and the Asia-Pacific region. Nevertheless, within the existing possibilities the process of enhancing connectivity between India's Northeast and Southeast Asia (including Asia-Pacific region) is not an easy task because there are also geographical, technological, political and security challenges that will affect the practical operation of this growth. These challenges are manageable. What is needed now is to initiate intra-regional capacity building plans in the Northeast, which will include the development of better connectivity within the region, development of basic and export oriented industries, development of technical and entrepreneurial accomplishments in the local population through different training programmes, and finally to arrive at a consensus on a common agenda for the development of the Northeast, to utilise all the approved funds sanctioned for its development by the government and the international agencies in an effective and result-oriented way. To do this, at the micro-level, corruption in any form in the different states of the Northeast has to be reduced and more awareness has to be created. People living in the periphery of different areas of the Northeast have to be linked with the people who are aware of the developmental projects initiated by the Government for the northeastern region. The political leaders of the region must quickly adapt themselves to the development projects and influence others to adopt it. Similarly, at the macro-level, the Northeast should be directly included in various subregional initiatives, such as the The Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC), Mekong Ganga Cooperation and Kunming initiative, as a separate economic entity, which, in turn, would facilitate the harnessing of available

regional economic opportunities. The bottom line is that the idea of enhancing connectivity between the Northeast and Southeast Asia is a very important step and holds the potential to change the social and economic landscape of the region. The aim is not only to create this effective atmosphere for the region to grow but also to recognise that it should be supplemented by efforts to keep the region ready for any type of investments.⁷

With the paradigm switch from a state-centred approach to one of interdependence and global and regional cooperation, we have become all the more aware of the geo-economic potential of the northeastern region as an entryway to East Asia and Southeast Asia. It is a fact that by steadily integrating this region through cross-border market access, the northeastern states can establish the link between the Indian economy and what is arguably the fastest developing and most vibrant area in the world. But, before we progress further, it is important for us to examine the present condition of Northeast India, which is creating a barrier towards the proper implementation of India's Look East Policy, through the region itself, the economic aspects of which have been identified. The region today is in the midst of insurgency, anti-state activities, repression and instability. In many cases the logic of the local inhabitants of the region is different from that of the framers of India's Look East Policy. Therefore, it is significant for us to identify the basic problem of the region, that which is acting as a roadblock in the way of implementing India's Look East Policy. This project endeavours to give a background of the existing political and societal instability that exists in the region and concentrate on some of the aspects of how to get rid of the present crises. To explain this, relevant historical contexts will be mentioned in this chapter. It is evident that without analysing the root cause of the problems in Northeast India, India's Look East Policy cannot be worked. In other words, peace and stability in Northeast India are a required condition to implement it.

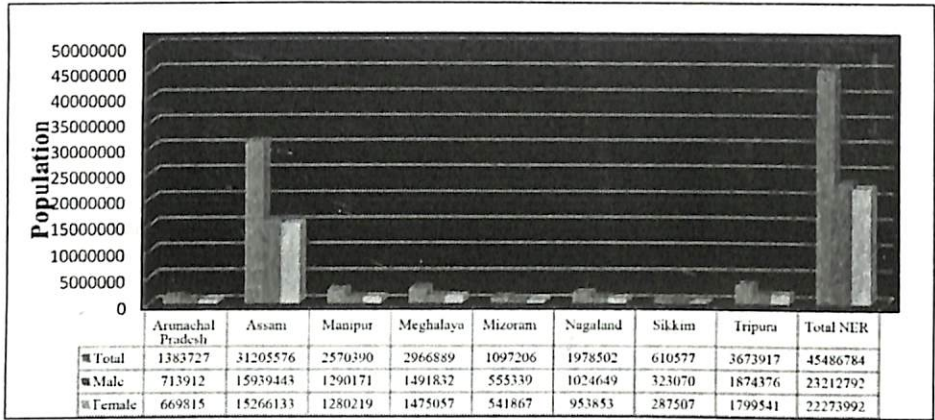
Northeast India: The Population

India's northeast is comprised of the state of Sikkim⁸ and the other seven states of India, namely, Assam, Arunachal Pradesh,⁹ Manipur,¹⁰ Meghalaya,¹¹ Mizoram,¹² Nagaland¹³ and Tripura.¹⁴ The northeastern region is surrounded by countries like Bhutan, China, Burma, and Bangladesh on the North-South and the East except for a long, narrow passageway in the West which connects the region with West Bengal and the rest of India. It is estimated that these States cover a total area of over 255,088 sq. km (7.7 per cent of the country's territory) and, according to the 2011 Census of India, a population of 45,486,784 persons (3.76 per cent of national population). Table 1 gives the idea of the State-wise distribution of Population in India's Northeastern Region.

**Table 1: State-wise Distribution of Population
(Census 2011, Government of India) ***

States	Population			Rural			Urban		
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
Arunachal Pradesh	1383727	713912	669815	1066358	546011	520347	317369	167901	149468
Assam	31205576	15939443	15266133	26807034	13678989	13128045	4398542	2260454	2138088
Manipur	2570390	1290171	1280219	1736236	878469	857767	834154	411702	422452
Meghalaya	2966889	1491832	1475057	2371439	1194260	1177179	595450	297572	297878
Mizoram	1097206	555339	541867	525435	269135	256300	571771	286204	285567
Nagaland	1978502	1024649	953853	1407536	725472	682064	570966	299177	271789
Sikkim	610577	323070	287507	456999	242797	214202	153578	80273	73305
Tripura	3673917	1874376	1799541	2712464	1387173	1325291	961453	487203	474250
Total NER	45486784	23212792	22273992	37083501	18922306	18161195	8403283	4290486	4112797

* Table 1 be may be represented graphically as in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Gender-wise Population of Northeastern States

The population of Northeast India is the mixture of a large number of cultural groups who migrated from different directions at various historical times. These groups are comprised of various racial identities having diverse social and ethnic customs and speaking different languages. For most of them, Northeast India is their indigenous soil. This area has been occupied by different streams of the *Mongoloid* people who came from the north and the east of the region at different phases of history. Scholars are of the view that the *Australoids* group of human population came to this area prior to the coming of the *Mongoloids*, who partially or fully absorbed the Australoid strains. In other words, the physical characteristics of different kin groups of Northeast India suggest that the *Australoid* elements are present in some form or the other in different groups of people who migrated to the region in the past. It has been stated historically that long ago one segment of the *Indo-Mongoloids* population spread over the whole of the Brahmaputra valley, North Bengal and East Bengal (now Bangladesh) giving rise to various tribal groups inhabiting this region (Chaterji, 1974: 27-28). The diverse *Mongoloid* groups steadily settled down in different habitats and ecological settings of the northeastern region and condensed into distinct entities which are referred to as *tribes* of the region today. This is important to note that the migration of people from ancient to present times and from various

directions to Northeast India have extensively contributed towards the growth of ethnic diversities in the region. Besides the tribal groups, a few other non-tribal groups have also come into existence as a consequence of prolonged interaction between the cultures of the migrants and those of the indigenous people. The spread of Hinduism and other sects of Hinduism including *Vaishnavism*; invasions of different outside rulers at different historical periods; integration of the northeastern region with the rest of India in the nineteenth century and migrations that took place as late as the last century have also greatly transformed the region socially, culturally, economically and politically.¹⁵

Ethnic Problems in Northeastern Region: An Overview

One of the important dimensions of politics of the springing up world that affects the domestic and the International politics is the ethnic struggles and conflict resolution. Ethnic conflict refers to the fight that takes place between two or more “ethnic communities.” According to Anthony Smith (1993), an “ethnic community” is “a named human population with a myth of common ancestry, shared memories, and cultural elements; a link with a historic territory or homeland; and a measure of solidarity.” Michael E. Brown’s *Ethnic Conflict and International Security* (1993) is an excellent book that deals with the impact of ethnic conflict on International Politics. He considers, even though some systematic conditions are essential for ethnic conflict to occur, it is collective memory that forms the preconditions of the conflict. The structural factors he identifies in the ethnic conflict are: *First*, more than one ethnic group must live in close proximity; *secondly*, national, regional and international authorities must not be very strong to prevent groups from fighting and too weak to ensure the protection of private groups. The refugee problem and the use of weapons is the natural result of the ethnic conflict, Brown noted. But, interestingly enough, the ethnic problem in Northeast has its own peculiar features which may be different from the idea of the ethnic problem as conceived by Smith or Brown. Today, the Northeast India

is marked by amazing ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic diversity, with more than 160 Scheduled Tribes belonging to five different ethnic groups, and a large and diverse non-tribal population as well.¹⁶ There are three widely accepted terminologies of the group of people referred to as Scheduled Tribes in the Indian context. These are: (a) *Tribals*, (b) *Adivasis* and (c) *Indigenous People*. Scholars have pointed out that it is difficult to identify as well as to define tribes. Scholars have also pointed out that there has been more anxiety with the identification of *tribes* than with their definition. However, there are several measures used to identify and define *tribes* which range from such features as geographical seclusion, primitive technology, condition of living, a general backwardness to the practice of animism, tribal language, physical characteristics, and many others. The problem, however, lay in the fact that due to the limited knowledge and involvement of the scholars, the geographical location, origin of their languages, their knowledge towards science and technology, etc., have not been clearly formulated nor scientifically applied while identifying and defining the tribes. Thus, their identification creates a great problem for the scholars who deal with them. It may be noted here that tribes in the central, western and southern part of India prefer to call themselves *Adivasis* rather than tribes. The term *Adivasi*, however, has little acceptance amongst the population in the northeastern region of the country with the term generally being used by them to refer to that group of people who work in the tea gardens in Assam. Scholars are of the opinion that the term "Adivasi," therefore, is used in the East and Northeast India for identifying the migrant tribal labourers and small peasants of Central India. As a result the local populations in these States find it humiliating to identify themselves as *Adivasi*. On the other hand, the concept of the tribe has been conceptualised and theorised by various scholars who define tribes as "nationalities." Simply that many scholars do not concur with this and prefer to call the *clans* as an *ethnic* group. According to many scholars *tribes* are the targets of various categorisation processes. From the position of the "others," they name themselves as Primitive Society, Tribe,

Segmented Society, Aborigines, Backward Hindus, ethnic minority, Nation and Nationalities, primitive to post-primitive, vulnerable, culturo-political entities, *adivasis*, or indigenous people.¹⁷ It is noteworthy that the tribal communities in Northeast India are living along the boundary of three great political communities: India, China and Burma (Myanmar). Historically, some of them took active roles in the process of integration of various communities. For example, in the pre-colonial times of the region, especially in the Khasi and Jaintia regions, Kachari and Chutiya kingdoms, ethnicity was a determining component in the organisation of society over and above other factors that were relevant at that time in regard to the formation of societies.

With the passage of time external powers started to influence the lives of the tribal population in Northeast India. The situation started to change when help was extended by East India Company to the *Ahom* Kingdom to stop the Burmese invasion and the *Treaty of Yandaboo* was signed,¹⁸ by which the Ahom King surrendered a portion of his land to the British East India Company as a reward in the year 1826. Thereafter the British continuously expanded their administration in the area. It may be pointed out here that Assam was part of the Bengal Province of British India until 1874. Nevertheless, there was a restructuring of the region under the colonial rulers. As a result, the two princely states of Manipur and Tripura came under the British command after the British conquest in 1891. The history of Northeast India until India's independence was a story of the expansion of British regulation and of social, economic and political changes in the neighbourhood. However, during the initial years of colonial rule, the British avoided interfering in the activities of the tribal population. Scholars are of the belief that the British Government was tending, on the whole, to leave the tribesmen alone, largely because the responsibility of governance, particularly in the border areas, was difficult and the areas unreachable.

Gradually, the British rulers in India initiated an innovative policy to rule the tribal people living in the hill areas. They developed a policy

which may be termed as the *policy of non-interference* and it was particularly applicable to the hill communities, especially in the northeastern region of India. Moreover, the *policy of non-interference* was followed to restrict opposition from the hill communities to the colonial rulers who were very much interested to pursue their commercial activities in the region. This policy was initiated because the tribal communities in the hill areas of the northeastern region initially objected greatly to British activities in their neighbourhood. The other reason for the implementation of this policy was that it was too hard for the colonial rulers to control the region because of the differences in language and cultural mindset. Thus the policy of non-interference initially made the tribal people apathetic towards the British rulers. With the passage of time, tribal communities who predominantly inhabited the hills areas were forcefully merged with the princely states and into different districts for the so-called “administrative convenience” of the colonial rulers. In due course the hill communities in Northeast India were taken under different territorial administrative authorities and thus the concept of territorial politics was introduced, hitherto unknown to the hill communities. This is possibly the root cause of the troubles we are confronting in the northeastern region today. But the data we get about the region today is essentially based on the mapping of the tribes in the region by the ethnographers of the colonial times. It was difficult for Indian ethnographers to conduct research in those areas at that time due to several reasons. As a result the colonial ethnographers became the pioneers in documenting the tribes in the northeast. Thus, we cannot undermine their contribution in terms of knowledge and data along the northeastern region, particularly on tribes. However, their methodology and motive may be problematic.¹⁹ Today, there are several scholars who are doing their best to determine the basic cause of the troubles in the northeastern part of India. Most of them will agree upon the fact that the problems in the Northeast had a radical orientation during the colonial times and assumed various shapes and

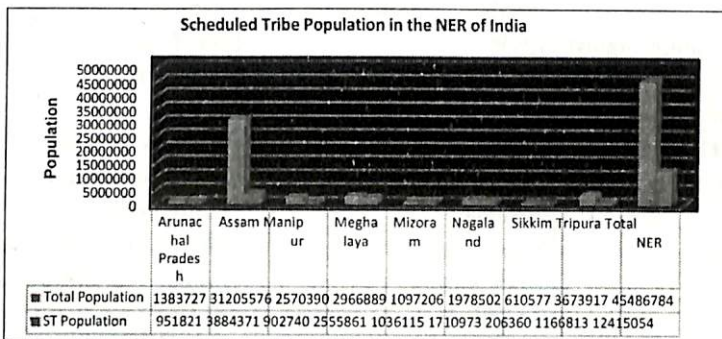
builds in later years varying from anti-state activities to inter-tribal differences. Today, this problem is still persisting in Northeast India. Inter-tribe disputes still exist in the region. Many new factors have been added to this. There is also a rise of Scheduled Tribe population during the last several years. Their numbers today are noteworthy. Table 2 gives us an estimate of the distribution of the Scheduled Tribe Population in the Northeastern Region of India in recent years:

Table 2: Tribal Population in the Northeastern Region²⁰

State	Total Population	ST Population	Percentage of ST
Arunachal Pradesh	1383727	951821	68.79
Assam	31205576	3884371	12.45
Manipur	2570390	902740	35.12
Meghalaya	2966889	2555861	86.15
Mizoram	1097206	1036115	94.43
Nagaland	1978502	1710973	86.48
Sikkim	610577	206360	33.80
Tripura	3673917	1166813	31.76
Total NER	45486784	12415054	27.29

The Tribal population of the Northeastern Region may be represented as below:

Figure 2: Scheduled Tribe Population in Northeastern Region Government (Census 2011, Government of India)



Today, Northeast India comprises very many tribal groups with distinct characteristics. Table 3 gives us an idea of the major tribal groups in the different Northeastern States as it is today.

Table 3: State-wise List of Tribes in Northeast India

Arunachal Pradesh	Assam	Meghalaya
Abor	In the autonomous	Chakma
Aka	Districts of Karbi	Dimasa, Kachari
Apatani	Anglong and North Cachar	Garo
Nyishi	Hills:	Hajong
Galo	Hmar	
Khampti	Chakma	Khasi, Jaintia, Synteng, Pnar,
Howa	Dimasa, Kachari	War, Bhoi,
Mishmi, Idu,	Garo	Lyngngam
Taroan	Hajong	Lakher
Momba	Hmar	Man (Tai Speaking)
Any Naga tribes	Khasi:	Any Mizo (Lushai) tribes
Sherdukpen	Jaintia	Mikir
Singpho	Synteng	Any Naga tribes
Hrusso	Pnar,	Pawi
Tagin	War	Synteng
Khamba	Bhoi,	Boro Kacharis
Adi	Lyngngam	Koch
Manipur	Any Kuki tribes,	Raba, Rava
Aimol	including:	Any Kuki tribes, including:
Anal	Biате, Biete	Biате, Biete
Angami	Changsan	Changsan
Chiru	Chongloi	Chongloi
Chothe	Doungel	Doungel
Gangte	Gamallhou	Gamallhou
Hmar	Gangte	Gangte
Kabui, Inpui, Rongmei	Guite	Guite
Kacha, Naga,	Hanneng	Hanneng
Liangmai, Zeme		
Koirao, Thangal	Haokip, Hauptit	Haokip, Hauptit
Koireng	Haolai	Haolai xi. Hengna
Kom	Hengna	Hongsungh
Lamgang	Hongsungh	Hrangkhwal, Rangkhoh
Mao	Hrangkhwal,	Jongbe
Maram	Rangkhoh	Khawchung

Maring	Jongbe	Khawathlang,
Any Mizo (Lushai)	Khawchung	Khothalong
tribes	Khawathlang	Khelma
Monsang	Khothalong	Kholhou
Moyon	Khelma	Kipgen
Paite	Kholhou	Kuki
Purum	Kipgen	Lengthang
Ralte	Kuki	Lhangum
Sema	Lengthang	Lhoujem
Simte	Lhangum	Lhouvun
Suhte	Lhoujem	Lupheng
Tangkhum	Lhouvun	Mangiel
Thadou	Lupheng	Misao
Vaiphei	Mangiel	Riang
Zou	Misao	Sairhem
Poumai Naga	Riang	Selnam
Tarao	Sairhem	Singson
Kharam	Selnam	Sitlhou
Any Kuki tribes	Singson	Sukte
Mate	Sitlhou	Thado
Mizoram	Sukte	Thangngeu
Chakma	Thado	Uibuh
Dimasa (Kachari)	Thangngeu	Vaiphei
Garo	Uibuh	Nagaland
Hajong	Vaiphei	Naga
Hmar	Lakher	Kuki
Khasi and Jaintia,	Man (Tai speaking)	Kachari
(Including Khasi,	Any Miz (Lushai) tribes	Mikir
Synteng or Pnar, War,	Karbi	Garo
Bhoi or Lyngngam)		Paite
Lakher	Any Naga tribes	Sikkim
Man (Tai-speaking)	Pawi	Bhutia (including Chumbipa,
Any Mizo (Lushai)	Syntheng	Dophap, Dukpa, Kagatey,
tribes		Sherpa, Tibetan, Tromop,
Mikir	Lalung	Yolmo)
Any Naga tribes.		Lepcha
Pawi	II. In the State of	Limboo
Synteng	Assam including the	
Any Kuki Tribes,	Bodo land territorial	
including Biata, Biete	Areas District and	
Changsan	excluding the	
Chongloi	autonomous districts	
	of Karbi Anglong and	
	North Cachar Hills	

Doungel		Tamang
Gamalhou		Tripura
Gangte		Bhil
Guite	1. Barmans in Cachar	Bhutia
Hanneng	2. Boro, Borokachari	Chaimal
Haokip, Haupit	3. Deori	Chakma
Haolai xi. Hengna	4. Hojai	Garoo
Hongsungh	5. Kachari, Sonwal	Halam, <i>Bengshel, Dub,</i>
Hrangkhwal,	6. Lalung	Kaipeng, Kalai, Karbong,
Rangkhohol	7. Mech	Lengui, Mussum, Rupini,
Jongbe	8. Miri	Sukuchep, Thangchep
Khawchung	9. Rabha	Jamatia
Khawathlang,	10. Dimasa	Khasia
Khothalong	11. Hajong	Lepcha
Khelma	12. Singhpho	Lushai
Kholhou	13. Khampti	Mag
Kipgen	14. Garo	Munda, Kaur
Kuki		Noatia, Murashing
Lengthang		Orang
Lhangum		Riang
Lhoujem		Santal
Lhouvun		Tripura, Tripuri, Tippera
Lupheng		Uchai
Mangjel		Kuki, including:
Misao		the following sub-tribes: (i)
Riang		Balte (ii) Belalhut
Sairhem		(iii) Chhalya (iv) Fun
Selnam		(v) Hajango
Singson		(vi) Jangtei (vii) Khareng
Sitlhou		(viii) Khephong (ix) Kuntei
Sukte		(x) Laifang (xi) Lentei
Thado		(xii) Mizel (xiii) Namte
Thangngeu		(xiv) Paitu, Paite
Uibuh		(xv) Rangchan (xvi)
Vaiphei		Rangkhohle (xvii) Thangluya

As pointed out earlier, the political culture of Northeast India today is marked by ethnicity and extremism for a long time. The assertion of various ethnic identities and the attitude of the state in containing ethnic extremism made the region distinct from the rest of India. The original cause of ethnic unrest can be found in the identity crisis of

various tribal communities who extend beyond the territorial boundaries created by the Indian state. Most of the ethnic crises we are facing today in the region are due to ethnic groups' aggressive attempts to protect their identity, culture and language. For example, it is argued that *claims to ethno-nationalism of the Bodos can be interpreted as closely intertwined with issues of institutional and social exclusion based on language politics* (Saikia, 2011: 60). In other words, the basis of ethnic assertion can be seen in two contexts. *First*, there is always a subjective consciousness amongst the tribals of being excluded, oppressed and marginalised. The history of the region has proved this idea. The colonial rulers as well as the post-colonial rulers never concentrated on this issue very much. *Secondly*, the process of development failed to address the legitimate rights of the people of this region. It may be mentioned here that when the Ahom Kingdom of Assam was weakened, rebellion broke out and gradually the whole land witnessed confusion and misery. In like manner of the Ahoms, the Chin-Lushai-Kukis had faced the same problem. The colonial rulers isolated the land by implementing the Inner Line Regulations called, *The Bengal, Eastern Frontier Regulation, 1973 (Regulation V of 1873) amended in 1873*. As a result, the inner line passes were introduced. The passes were required for the *Lushais* to enter into British India. The Inner Line Regulation was practised on the reverse from 1925. Since then *non-Lushais* were not allowed to enter in the *Lushai*²¹ country without passes duly signed by designated or authorised officers. It was revealed that the *Lushais* being external people were regarded as foreigners by the British. The Nagas and the North Cachar people also fell in the same category.²² This isolation is continuing till date. Today Indian citizens too need to have inner line permits to enter into the states of Manipur, Mizoram, Arunachal Pradesh and Nagaland. Foreigners also need to have requisite permits to enter into many of the regions of Northeast India.

Though after independence the Indian state tried to amalgamate and assimilate various ethnic communities in the mainstream national

identity, the development process generated a feeling of disaffection among them. Moreover, development led to the unequal distribution of resources across the population of the region. Hence, the cultural, political as well as economic factors created a sense of exclusion among some ethnic communities. This is also clear from the writing of Upa K. Saibela in 1997 which states, in Mizo language: “India Independent tirh atanga kum 50-na inkarahian, kan khawtlang nunah na na na hi chuan, a tha lam aiin a chhe lamah thil a danglam a ni tih kan hre theuhvin ka ring,”²³ which means, in English, that during the fifty years of independence, things have gone astray in the wrong directions in respect of our social life, in particular.

In Northeast India, the fear of exclusion started even before Independence. Since the colonial times there was a fear amongst the indigenous population that they might lose their right to land, territories and resources which they have traditionally owned. The *Nagas* predicted the chance of elimination in post-colonial India in the case of their integration with the Indian Union, and started mobilising Nagas for a separate nation free from the domination of the Indian nation. Moreover, they also felt that their community life and values would be threatened with the increasing number of different communities from other parts of India. It is pertinent to say that the Nagas, who were politically and culturally one of the active ethnic minorities, demanded separation from India as soon as India became independent. From 1956 onwards, the movement became violent in nature and the groups started to use violence as a means to achieve their goals. By the mid of the 1960s, the Nagas joined the Mizos. Despite several decades of low-level insurgency, neither group could achieve their demand for separation. Details have been discussed in the later part of this chapter. The sense of this social exclusion in the Northeast was articulated with the emergence of new social forces—educated elite (many of them got an appointment in the government sector), students, youth groups and others. It is again important to note here that the diffusion among the local population

started due to the weak ties between the ethnic groups, on the one side, and the government and the local population, on the other. Since the demand for identity is the demand of the disconnected groups of Northeast India, it created political diffusion and led to the emergence of new social forces creating a gap in the network of the groups. Other reasons for the emergence of social forces in the Northeast include, the emergence of Christianity and its impact on the sociocultural and economic life of the people, spread of education, etc. These factors acted as major agents of recent changes in the northeastern region. In other words, the emergence of a market-economy in India also brought a change in the northeastern region in recent times. All these factors together contributed greatly in this change. More specifically, scholars have identified three major agents of change among the tribes of Northeast India. These are (a) *the state* (b) *civil society*, the Church remained a major force behind the emergence of civil society and (c) *market forces*. (Oommen, 2009: 10). At the same time, ethnic identity provided the ground for the mobilisation of ethnic groups. It is argued that the process of ethnic identity formation in the northeastern region was based largely on the idea of *group* formation (Karna, 1991). They were able to form groups because of technological mobility and the rise of modern communication systems. Moreover, the social exclusion of ethnic communities has a dialectical link with psychological exclusion of the tribal communities of the region. These include exclusion from formal governmental and non-governmental institutions. The tribals think that this exclusion is due to their lack of cognitive orientation and the epistemological inequality due to lack of access to epistemological resources. The impersonation of their social, cultural, economic and political life with people from other communities or modern states further accelerated this process.²⁴

In this backdrop, we have to review the fact that India's Northeast has been the land of many insurgencies. The emotional power of appeals of ethnicity has created a new momentum in the present-day world

order characterised by the forces of globalisation and the shrinking of national boundaries. Demands by ethnic groups in several countries for secession from the wider state system have become an important feature of political development. Similarly, India has problems with several regions of the country which threaten the integrity of the nation. Many troubles have gone up in the course of the origination of a greater Indian consciousness, which has been the goal of the Government in New Delhi, and which has yet to be reached. While the idea has been that the greater Indian consciousness would submerge the consciousness of smaller nationalities, the trend in India seems to have been the other fashion. Northeast India is one such region, which is preventing India from producing a greater Indian Consciousness.²⁵ Alternatively, the ethnic struggle in Northeast India has given rise to insurgency since 1947. Starting with the *Naga* insurgency since India's independence in 1947, several insurgency movements have sprung up in most of the states of the region. There was a time when about 120 insurgent groups spread their activities in the seven states of the Northeast, excluding Sikkim (Sikkim was bracketed under Northeast in 2003). Interestingly enough, the demands of the insurgent groups have been wide-ranging. Groups like the *United Liberation Front of Asom* (ULFA) and *National Socialist Council of Nagaland: Isak-Muivah* (NSCN-IM) aim at establishing independent states. On the other hand, armed Bodo tribesmen wanted their own "Bodoland" state which they can themselves rule. Groups like Bodo Liberation Tigers (BLT) demanded separate states for their tribal constituency. Other organisations, such as the *United People's Democratic Solidarity* (UPDS) and *Dima Halam Daogah* (DHD), confining their activities to some districts in Assam, have fought for maximum autonomy within the purview of the Indian constitution. The reasons behind dissent against the Indian state are many. The *National Liberation Front of Tripura* (NLFT) and the *All Tripura Tiger Force* (ATTF) insurgencies in Tripura are rooted in the sense of alienation of the indigenous tribes due to the constant migration from Bangladesh (formerly East

Pakistan). One of the agendas of ULFA was to highlight the problems Assam is facing as a result of Bangladeshi migration. On the other hand, in Manipur, several groups operated in the valley areas of Manipur to protest against the forcible accession of the state to the Indian union and subsequent neglect of their language and the delayed statehood conferred on the state. Similarly, apathy shown by the central government to the area suffering from a famine triggered the militancy in Mizoram spearheaded by the *Mizo National Front* (MNF).²⁶

Thus, it is to be accepted that the India's Independence developed some sort of anxiety amongst the tribal population of the region. In many cases the Government of India has failed to address the micro-level problem that exists in the region. The Look East Policy initiated by the Government of India is undoubtedly a tool to remove the problem of isolation in Northeast India, but there is the *lack of trust* that the Indian government has failed to address. The involvement of the common stakeholders of Northeast India is necessary for the proper execution of India's Look East policy without which the problems in the northeastern region cannot be worked out. Therefore fear of isolation is likely to continue. However, India has been successful in integrating ethnic diversities because it eventually bowed to popular demands for "linguistic" and "tribal" ethnic states. India's ethnic diversity is not a problem to be fully solved, but one that is to be managed continuously.

Northeast India: The Problems of the Region

It is known to everyone today that India's Northeast is the region of the earliest and longest lasting insurgency in the country. The problem of insurgency started in Nagaland in 1952, and gradually multiplicity of more recent fights have proliferated, especially since the late 1970s. Most of the states in the Northeastern Region today witness scales of conflict that can be categorised as low-intensity wars, and may be defined as conflicts in which fatalities are more than normal every year.

Historically speaking, and as already noted, Northeast India is a creation of the Partition of India. Before partition, there was no concept of a separate northeast region, and that was the time when all the provinces or hill regions that now constitute the northeastern region were closely linked. Also, trade, economy, movement and education, to the adjoining areas of East Bengal or Burma (today's Myanmar) was a common feature at that time. For example, the *Khasi*, *Jaintia* and *Garo* Hills maintained close relations with *Sylhet*, the Mizo hills with the Chittagong Hills Tracts and Tripura with *Comilla*, *Noakhali* and *Sylhet*. During this time, parts of the Mizo Hills, Manipur and the Naga Hills had direct links with Burma, where many of their ethnic kinsmen lived. The areas of the former North-East Frontier Agency (now Arunachal Pradesh) had close contacts with Tibet and Bhutan. In fact, these tribal regions had closer ties with the adjoining regions of Bengal and Burma, than with each other. These areas enjoyed various degrees of independence. All this suddenly changed after India gained independence.

Scholars are of the view that partition and the Chinese takeover of Tibet resulted in the creation of new international political boundaries, replacing the soft territorial frontiers of South Asia. Post-colonial India found itself loaded with a very complex problem in the Northeast. The entire Northeast which once took in an approach to the bordering Tibet, Burma, Bangladesh and Bhutan now had merely a slight link with the residuum of the country with a 21-kilometre wide "Siliguri corridor" in North Bengal, popularly known as "Chicken's Neck." This got the entire region landlocked. The suffocation also influenced the population of the entire northeast of India, causing much discomfort in the area.

During the initial years of independence, three major developments affected India's policy outlook for this newly created frontier region. *First*, the Chinese occupation of Tibet, which contributed to the vanishing of an important buffer zone between India and China and

brought the Chinese Army right to the borders of India. *Secondly*, the eruption of the Naga insurgency, which is perhaps India's first ethnic revolt, and *thirdly*, the change in East Pakistan's political climate, where the communal outlook of the Partition days slowly passed on the way to the Bengali language movement and challenged Pakistani authority. As a consequence of these developments, Muslim colonialism was replaced by Bengali linguistic assertion in East Pakistan, which indirectly influenced India in its nation-building process.

Generally speaking, the Chinese presence on India's borders, and the constant Pakistani support to the Naga, and then to the Mizo, Manipuri and Tripura insurgents, came to be comprehended as a major security threat, and gave rise to an "insecurity syndrome" in New Delhi. Subsequently growing tensions in East Pakistan came to be regarded as an advantage for India. After the Pakistani military operation on the erstwhile East Pakistan had started in March 1971, it became important for India to consider the advantage of the situation to delink China from West Pakistan. India might have thought at that time that cutting Pakistan into two nations would prevent a Sino-Pakistani nexus in the East, and that would help India to protect her Northeast.²⁷

It is also important to analyse that the Sino-India war in 1962 left a strong impression on India's policy planners, because the war was not at all favourable to India. The war had presented the significant pre-eminence of China's land army, and its intent to disturb India's Himalayan defences. It raised the threat of a Chinese thrust southwards to the Bay of Bengal, and India realised that as long as West Pakistan had firm control over its eastern wing, i.e., East Pakistan, the fear of a Sino-Pakistani nexus might disturb India's security. It is noteworthy that the 1962 war with China, and the 1965 war with Pakistan, coincided with the outbreak of several ethnic insurgencies in Northeast India. The Mizos, Manipuris and the Tripuris rapidly raised insurgent groups, and set out to trace the course of the Naga insurgency. Gradually, from 1956 onwards, the Nagas had been receiving weapons and training in

East Pakistan. During that year, A. Z. Phizo, one of the major leaders of Naga insurgency, had fled to Dhaka, from where he was flown to London on a false passport provided by the Pakistani authorities.²⁸ Researchers have pointed out that during 1956-66, Pakistan trained at least eight batches of Naga insurgents (1,700 people in all), and fortified them.²⁹ Confirmed sources say that during the late 1960s, the Pakistanis also started to supply training and weaponry to the Mizo National Front and the Manipur and Tripura based insurgents. During 1966, insurgent Nagas started going to China for advanced training in guerilla warfare. This was the time when Pakistan-China relations were at the apogee. This is evident from the statement made by the then Indian Foreign Minister on April 8, 1966:

In the International sphere, the Chinese relationship with several other countries had received setbacks, for example, with Indonesia and Africa Chinese are happy with Pakistanis as they explain the Chinese position to the international community.³⁰

The growing association of China and Pakistan in promoting these insurgencies annoyed the government in New Delhi. The Indian government felt helpless and immediately resorted to an armed solution to the trouble. But, at the same time, along with the greater deployment of army and paramilitary forces, in an effort to look for a political answer to the problems, New Delhi also tried to initiate dialogues with the subversive groups, particularly the Nagas. In one phase, India was still willing to consider a protectorate status for Nagaland but once the Bengali upsurge started in East Pakistan in early 1971, the Indian state saw a great opportunity in it to solve its northeastern problem. India, initially, was not sure of whether military intervention was the proper course of action in East Pakistan, but it soon convinced the Indian policy planners that the partition of Pakistan was essential for a longstanding solution of India's security concerns in the Northeast.

India noticed clearly that the end of Pakistani domination of its eastern wing, and the emergence of a friendly Bangladesh, would help to stop the Sino-Pakistani nexus, which would eventually stabilise the problems in Northeast India. Thus, Smt. Indira Gandhi, the then Prime Minister of India, took absolute advantage of the situation and helped East Pakistan to fight the war against West Pakistan and played an important role in the formation of Bangladesh, in the year 1971. A non-hostile Bangladesh instead of a hostile East Pakistan was considered more desirable by India during this time. Given the encouragement being offered on and off to centrifugal elements in India's northeastern states from East Pakistani bases, it was natural for New Delhi to support the liberation movement which, in addition, had a powerful humanistic rationale in the context of Pakistan's denial of democratic rights to the Bengali-speaking population. The cultural and emotional sympathy of the people of West Bengal for the East Pakistanis buttressed these considerations.³¹

With the emergence of Bangladesh, the security scenario in Northeast India began to undergo a monumental variety. Within four years of the formation of Bangladesh, Sikkim was merged with India in 1975 in controversial circumstances. In the same year, the *Shillong Accord* was signed with a section of Naga insurgents. As a result, the breakaway group of the Naga National Council soon resumed its armed activities. This breakaway group, known as the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN), was largely composed of insurgents trained by China. In the midst of this critical situation, in 1976, the Mizo National Front also signed an arrangement with the Indian government in Calcutta. Though it took another ten years to give final shape to the settlement, the part of the Mizo insurgency began to wane in the late 1970s. At the same time this era was noted by the gradual end of the aggressive Chinese patronage to guerrilla groups from Northeast India and Burma (Myanmar). The continuation of Chinese patronage to insurgent groups was ended by the year 1982.

New Delhi was relieved temporarily. The Indian government got the temporary assurance to restore peace in the northeastern region due to the creation of Bangladesh, the limited settlements of the Naga and the Mizo problems and the mounting counter-insurgency operations in the northeastern region of India.

This situation did not go on for a very long time. The situation started to change again when Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the first prime minister of Bangladesh, was replaced by army generals after his assassination on August 15, 1975. Mujib's death plunged the country into many years of political agitation. The coup leaders were soon overthrown and a series of counter-coups and political assassinations led the country to a poor political fate. After the serial publication of political disturbances, coups and counter-coups, Ziaur Rahman became the seventh President of Bangladesh in 1977. The post-1975 developments in Bangladesh made India anxious about its policy regarding the Northeast area. It is significant to mention here that Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's instant reaction to the Sheikh's assassination was to begin aiding the *Shanti Bahini* guerrillas in the Chittagong Hill Tracts.³² Almost immediately, Bangladesh's new government headed by Lieutenant General Ziaur Rahman started aiding the insurgents from Northeast India. The guerrilla movements in Northeast India, with the support of Bangladesh, took a new leap forward. With the passage of time these anti-India movements of Northeast India intensified. Their numbers were expected to grow, making Northeast India insecure.

The Change of Indian Policies towards Northeast India

In 1985, Rajiv Gandhi assumed power as Prime Minister of India after the assassination of Smt. Indira Gandhi in the year 1984. Rajiv Gandhi perceived the region of Northeast India meticulously and started to reorient India's policy towards the northeastern region. In the succeeding three years, Rajiv Gandhi's government signed a series

of accords with separatist and militant groups in Northeast India. The accords brought an initial end to the violent agitation in Assam, the insurgency in Mizoram and Tripura, and the agitation for a separate state of Gorkhaland in North Bengal. During his regime attempts were made to open negotiations with insurgent groups. In other words, Rajiv Gandhi, as Prime Minister of India, initiated the peace operation in Northeast India decades after the independence of India. The Indian government during this time received positive attention both nationally and internationally. Rajiv Gandhi realised the need for political settlements of the disputes. He changed government policy away from military action and focused primarily on political settlements. Rajiv Gandhi's initial mission towards establishing peace in Northeast India did not last long. During the late 1980s the demand for a separate Bodo State started. All Bodo Students Union under the leadership of Upendranath Brahma, intensified the agitation for a separate Bodo State in some parts of Assam after the 20th Convention of the All-Bodo Students Union held in December 1987. The agitation was set by the regular use of explosives on public transport, road and rail bridges. The Bodo agitation continued to fester until 1993, when an accord was ratified with the Bodos on New Delhi's initiative. The terms of the agreement being the same, it could not hold for long and, as a result, Bodo insurgent groups are still operating in the western and central areas of Assam.

Rajiv Gandhi's fall from power and the coming to power of Prime Minister Viswanath Pratap Singh, and later Prime Minister Chandrashekhar, marked the return of military operations in the northeastern region. The Chandrashekhar government gave the green signal for the first major counter-insurgency operation in Assam, popularly known as *Operation Bajrang*. This operation was launched against the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA), which had become an influential force in the late 1980s, and had unleashed a campaign of terror and extortion to mobilise its insurgent forces.

This was also the time when the NSCN started developing several groups elsewhere in the Northeast by consciously supporting them. In Tripura, new insurgent groups like the *All-Tripura Tiger Force* and the *National Liberation front of Tripura* emerged. Insurgency in the Imphal valley now manifested itself through several groups, but the activities of the People's Liberation Army got intensified. Likewise, the threat of an insurgent consolidation also emerged in the security scenario in Northeast India, as the Naga insurgent groups tried to get their own underground alliances. While the *Khaplang* group of the NSCN brought together ULFA and the United National Liberation Front (UNLF) of Manipur into the rather short-lived Indo-Burma Revolutionary Front, the *Isaac Muivah* group of the NSCN roped in the Bodo Security Force (which is now known as the National Democratic Front of Bodoland), the National Liberation Front of Tripura, and some smaller tribal insurgent groups into an informal alliance.

During the 1990s, three other developments in and around the Northeast came to be seen as security threats by Indian defence planners: (a) China during this time started to influence Myanmar both economically and politically; (b) The resurgence of insurgent movements in Northeast India, and it was apparent at the time that there was a support extended to these groups by Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (or ISI) to the northeastern insurgent groups. During this time a new sea route was opened for arms smuggling from Southeast Asia's illegal markets to Northeast India; and (c) The revival of the use of Bangladesh territory by insurgents, with the support of certain anti-Indian elements in that country. The Chinese had come out as the most important suppliers of military instruments to Myanmar's military government. China had also reportedly secured radar, refit and refuel facilities at the Myanmarese ports of Haingyi, the Cocos Islands, and Mergui. The naval unit of the pro-Indian insurgent group, the *National Unity Party of Arakan*, discovered Chinese survey activity around the island of Kyaw Pyu off the Arakan coast, suggesting that the Chinese

might be expected to establish another naval base in the Bay of Bengal. The Chinese threat to Indian security, so long considered as a land-based one, added a naval dimension to it. At that time many conceived that China's ambition to produce a blue-water Navy would mean that Calcutta (now Kolkata), Madras and Visakhapatnam (Vizag) would be directly under Chinese missile threats in near future. This is predicted from China's increased missile technology in recent years. In sum, in addition to the Northeast, where the Chinese threat remains, Government of India became worried about the protection of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, and the country's eastern coastal areas. In the 1990s, as indicated earlier, ULFA, NSCN and other insurgent groups of the Northeast developed contacts with Pakistan's intelligence agency. What was more important was the issue of a new weapons procurement source frequently used by the insurgent groups. The involvement of the northeastern terrorist groups with the illegal markets of Thailand became evident. It likewise was clear that Bangladesh's former military rulers provided the insurgents from Northeast India shelter and material to survive. Most insurgent leaders of Northeast India, who have since been arrested, carried Bangladeshi passports. For example, Anup Chetia (aka Golap Barua, Sunil Barua, Bhajjan and Ahmed) (whose prison term ended in 2003), was arrested in Dhaka on December 21, 1997 on charges of violating the Foreigners Act and the Passports Act of the country. Two of Chetia's associates, identified as Babul Sharma and Laxmi Prasad, were also arrested along with him in the year 1997.³³ The Bangladesh government during the 1990s was fully cognizant of the actions of Manipuri insurgents. As a consequence, the Indian government had stepped up operations against the rebels in the Northeast. Most insurgent organisations, with the exception of ULFA and the Manipuri groups, began to attack ethnic groups whom they perceived as enemies. There was a widespread feeling in India that while Awami League desired friendly relations with India, there were undercurrents of hostility in the approach of the Bangladesh Nationalist

Party (BNP) on relations with India. It was said that the BNP had a link with Pakistan's ISI. They jointly assisted and trained insurgent groups operating in India's Northeastern States, including the ULFA in Assam, the NSCN in Nagaland and the PLA in Manipur. The Indian and Myanmar armed forces had to conduct a coordinated operation in May 1995 to deal with the infiltration of such groups promoted and assisted by the Bangladesh Government. Today, it should be apparent to enlightened sections of the Bangladesh Government that, with the international community now increasingly hostile to terrorism, and the ISI itself being recognised globally as an organisation promoting terrorism, there is little to be gained by Bangladesh in allowing its soil to be used for cross-border terrorism. It is important for Bangladesh to understand that friendly relations with India and support for Indian insurgent groups cannot go hand in hand.³⁴

It was the time when the insurgent groups in Tripura regularly attacked villages of Bengali settlers, the Naga insurgents attacked the Kukis and vice versa, and the Bodo insurgents attacked the non-Bodo settlements. Creating compact population zones to support requirements for ethnic homelands has become part and parcel of the armed separatist movements in Northeast India. The Indian policymakers realised that Indian security concerns in the Northeast can be best addressed by mix of military action and political negotiation with the insurgent organisations, along with constant monitoring of Chinese military and diplomatic activities in countries bordering Northeast India, by cutting the sources of supply of weapons and funds to insurgents, and by developing a strong legitimate economy in the region, sustained by large-scale Indian and foreign investment, which would prevent the growth of a smuggling-oriented economy. Thus, till today governmental policies do not encourage international intervention in any form, in any conflict resolution procedures in the northeastern region, though mediated developmental interventions are sanctioned.³⁵

Initiation of Look East Policy of India

It is in this backdrop, during the year 1991 when he became Prime Minister of India, that Dr. P. V. Narasimha Rao wanted to bring certain changes in the Policy towards the northeastern region, in the midst of the crisis that the Government of India was facing concerning the northeastern region. Dr. Rao developed India's Look East Policy. India's Look East Policy is not merely an external economic policy that India had initiated. It is also a strategic shift in India's vision of the world and India's place in the evolving global economic organisation. In many ways the post-Cold War external environment of a globalising world gave India the chance to improve dealings with all major powers. It was also the time when India witnessed that there were not too many political rivals who could disturb India's ambition. Thus, in the year 1991, India launched its Look East Policy which became one of the major features of India's Foreign Policy in subsequent years. This also coincided with the period when India had launched the reform-oriented policies in the economic sphere.

With India's antagonism towards Pakistan and with its confused perception towards China, the Southeast Asian region did not figure much in its foreign policy till the early 1990s. After 1990, India realised the potential of Southeast Asia and realised too that the region was going to emerge as a growing market with tremendous potential with countries like Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia. India had never before concentrated much on China's involvement in the region, and now India realised the reality that China had already extended itself deeply in most of the Southeast Asian countries by virtue of China's developed and aggressive diplomacy. Though some analysts pointed out that by launching this policy India was trying to balance China's influence in this region, India had often repeated the fact, in different ways, that it was not willing to antagonise China in any manner. Indian policymakers understood that it was time to extend beyond the confines of SAARC if it had to get the benefits of the

economic potential of Southeast Asia and prove itself to be a regional force. In other words, India's Look East Policy marked a shift of strategic importance and helped India to develop its own perspective of Southeast Asia and Asia-Pacific. "Look East Policy" was an endeavour to forge closer and deeper economic integration with its eastern neighbours as a component of the new *realpolitik*. The engagement with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) was also a part of the recognition of the economic importance of Southeast Asia to the country's national interests.³⁶

In short, India's newest and alternative approach towards the region East of India was regarded as the "Look East Policy." It would be worthy to call up the scenario that existed when the Look East Policy was initiated. First, the decomposition of the Soviet Union marked the end of the Cold War. Secondly, a dramatically changing global scenario began to emerge with new equations and new relationships clearly on the horizon. Thirdly, at this time the United States became the sole global power. Fourthly, a rising China emerged as an increasingly significant player in East Asia. Fifthly, Japan came to a point of economic crisis and was under severe US criticism for its apathy in the first Gulf War and, thus, uncertain and confused about how to handle its relations with ASEAN, China and the United States. The ASEAN countries had dramatically transformed their economies by opening up to each other and got upward with the strategy of engaging China by forging increasingly close economic ties with it, and developed an increasing web of regional institutional linkages. On the other hand, it may be noted that ASEAN had tried to engage India earlier but had not been successful. Meanwhile, India lost its only friend of international strategic consequence, the Soviet Union, and found itself marginalised from the global mainstream in both the economic and political domains. Also, India's relation with the Southeast Asian nations was in poor shape. India's financial and economic condition was also not in good shape at this time. All these factors compelled India to embark on its economic reforms in

1991. India initiated reforms to restructure, deregulate, and liberalise its economic organisation. Whereas China's control in Southeast Asia became an important concern for India. China had provided military support to all of India's neighbours and significant assistance to Pakistan for its nuclear programme. This had been a serious destabilising factor for India. Further, China's rising presence in Southeast Asia had posed serious security concerns in India. In regard to China, India realised that a country in control of the Indo-China region would threaten India's security, and with China's tremendous presence in Southeast Asia, the threat may come from as many Southeast Asian states that have borders adjoining India. As a consequence, India has tried to improve its interaction with Southeast Asia by rebuilding its long-lost links with ASEAN. The Look East Policy represented the Indian response to this new and changing strategic milieu at the grassroots level. India's Look East Policy was a much needed policy because it dovetailed with³⁷ ASEAN'S fundamental strategic requirements. The fact is that ASEAN had always wanted India to be involved in the field, but it was India that had been reluctant and rejected ASEAN's overtures while continuing to pursue policies which ensured engagement. Thus, when India launched its Look East Policy the ASEAN nations appreciated it and responded favourably to it through the decision to accord sectoral dialogue partner status to India in 1992. Once India had used up the first step, it is the ASEAN that deserves greater credit for engaging India forward to the heights of relationship as it is today. It is particularly noteworthy that ASEAN's decision to accord full dialogue partner status to India in 1995 at the ASEAN summit in Thailand was made without India being given any prior indications whatsoever. Thereafter, in 1996 India was duly accepted as a full and normal member of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF). In the year 2002, on November 5, First ASEAN-India Summit took place. In the joint statement issued, it was noted that:

ASEAN and India committed themselves to jointly contribute to the promotion of peace, stability and development in the Asia-Pacific region and the world, and respond positively to the challenges of a dynamic regional and international environment.³⁸

The new geopolitical imagination set off by the new policy thinking envisages a space that seemingly refuses to be bound by the present geography of the Northeast inasmuch as it promises to propagate across the international borders of the countries of Southeast Asia through such Frontline states as Myanmar and Bangladesh. India realised that a comprehensive policy is required for the development of Northeast India and that cannot be done without involving the neighbouring states, Bangladesh and Myanmar. Also, India realised that there is a tremendous growth taking place in the Yunnan district of China which might help positively for the development of the northeastern region of India. And so, India started to perceive the adjacent countries within the purview of its Look East Policy. Thus, the extended Northeast, as being officially imagined, would have a positive effect in so far as it offered a solid ground to the alternative modalities of imagining the Northeast. In simple terms, the Northeast of India is the space between two subregions of Asia—South Asia and Southeast Asia. Both these regions are changing rapidly, marked by tremendous economic growth and development. For various reasons, India till the 1990s had not been able to leverage the various opportunities that this subregion of India had to offer. Gradually, as pointed out earlier, India started to exploit the opportunities for its northeastern region, and started to explore the natural and human resources of the northeastern states. Today's challenge is to harness these opportunities to ensure that growth and development do not bypass this region but pass by this section.

There has been a growing realisation by Indian policymakers that development of physical connectivity with Southeast Asia is a prerequisite to fully harnessing the opportunities provided by Look East Policy. In

parliamentary law to create the “Look East Policy” (even the creation of bodies like North East Council [NEC] and Ministry, like Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region [MDONER]) relevant for the region, India has put greater emphasis on increasing connectivity through all the possible modes of infrastructure development, such as land routes, railways, air connectivity, waterways, energy infrastructure development, both in the study of hydroelectric and hydrocarbon, and telecommunication linkages. The important ongoing and potential infrastructure projects in this regard are the roadway between Moreh, Tamu and Kalewa Road, the Trilateral Highway, Trans Asian Highway between the three countries like India, Myanmar and Thailand, India-Myanmar rail linkages, Kaladan Multimodal project, the Stilwell road, Myanmar-India-Bangladesh gas and oil pipeline, Tamanthi Hydroelectricity project and optical fibre network between Northeast India and Southeast Asia.³⁹ The Northeast should be included in several subregional initiatives, such as the BIMSTEC, Bangladesh-China-India and Myanmar (BCIM), Mekong Ganga Cooperation and Kunming initiative, as a separate economic entity, which, in turn, would facilitate the harnessing of available regional economic opportunities. The bottom line is that the idea of enhancing connectivity between Northeast and Southeast Asia is a welcome step and curbs the potential to change the social and economic landscape of the region. But to initiate this effectively it should be supplemented by efforts to prepare the Northeast for this opportunity.⁴⁰ It is a fact that by gradually integrating this region through cross-border market access, the Northeastern states can become the melting point between the Indian economy and Southeast Asia (also the Asia-Pacific Region), which is undoubtedly the fastest developing and most dynamic area in the world.

Conclusion

In this chapter we have discussed the demographic and the ethnological features of Northeast India. Along with this a historical representation of

the region has also been made. Thus, it is clear from the discussion that today, what is important is to establish a link between the development and Northeast India which can bring peace and prosperity in the region. It is desirable on the part of the Government to discuss more freely with the local stakeholders of the region. This will help in the process of confidence building and more confidence of the people of northeastern region can be deduced. To start with we have to keep in mind that if the Indian government really wants to establish peace in the Northeastern Region they have to retain the following premises in mind: (a) addressing inter-tribal hostility and competition that is present in the region; (b) more connections must be made by the government, both officially and informally, to convince the insurgent group in the neighbourhood about the advantages of remaining within India's federal system; (c) it is important for policymakers to understand that identities are neither sacrosanct nor static, and as such are no longer cultural artefacts anymore. It is important for policymakers to have the patience to deal with the stakeholders convincing them about the need of maturation in the Northeastern area. It is significant to read repeatedly that India's Look East Policy cannot bypass Northeastern region of India; (d) excess dependence on the elite groups of the area must be brought down. The elites have their own pursuits, which may not serve the interest of the neighbourhood. Recruitment of local people has to be made at the highest stage of government bureaux; (e) a complete survey of displacement, conditions of the local stakeholders like health, instruction and so on has to be made before the implementation of any development projects; and (f) an urgent industrial policy of the Government of India has to originate in the northeastern region which will also include the innovative initiatives like the construction of a sports university in Mizoram or Manipur, use of the rivers of the region for tourism purposes, and the like.

The hegemonic arrogance based on racial, cultural, national, oppression or fascist tendencies cannot be sustained for long. Likewise,

democracy, secularism, federalism, and the policy to live and let live with respect to coexistence of subnational or ethnic groups ensures solidarity and integrity of the national and/or federal state. Bringing this into account, Government of India has to administer the region with confidence and faith. At the same time, patience and tolerance are also needed to understand the region along with the theatrical role of the Government. Instead of commanding the region with armed mechanisms more initiatives have to be asked for to tackle the bureaucracy, army and the politicians of the area. Initiatives have to be adopted to reduce or, if possible to eliminate, corruption from the part which is generally managed by the elites who enjoy all the political and administrative forces. This only can assist the area to develop and can develop a nexus between the stakeholders and the regime which will finally facilitate the implementation of the Government of India's Look East Policy more effectively. In Northeast India today, there is an ideological struggle between the indigenous people and the ruling classes like the political leaders, bureaucrats and others. It is now time for the political leadership to be associated with the local people in exhaustive and pluralist form.

Notes

1. B. G. Verghese, "Unfinished Business in the Northeast: Priorities towards Restructuring, Reform, Reconciliation and Resurgence," Seventh Kamal Kumari Lecture, 2001, http://www.freeindiamedia.com/economy/19_june_economy.htm (Accessed July 15, 2014).
2. On July 2, 2008, the Prime Minister released the North Eastern Region Vision 2020, a document which identifies various challenges as well as the strategies required to bring about peace and prosperity in the North Eastern Region by 2020. The core theme of Vision 2020 is that the people of the North East nurture an urgent desire to march on the path of economic, social and cultural progress towards prosperity and well-being, to participate in governance and determine the allocation of public resources and public services they receive.
3. Dr. Shashi Tharoor in his Keynote address delivered at the International Conference on Northeast India in BIMSTEC: From Land Locked to Land Linked, held in Shillong between April 8-10, 2010 organised by the Jadavpur Association of International Relations, supported by the Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India.
4. Ibid.
5. Sharif M. Shuja, "An ethnic Indian quandary: Northeast India—a case study of ethnic provincialism." *Harvard Asia Pacific Review*, 2(2001):55. eLibrary. Web. October 5, 2014.

6. Ibid.
7. Julien Levesque, "Northeast in India's Look East Policy," Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies, no: 2558, May 6, 2008.
8. Sikkim was integrated as the eighth North Eastern Council state in 2002. For details refer North Eastern Council (Amendment Act), 2002.
9. Arunachal Pradesh, meaning "Land of the Rising Sun," has long been a known region of the Indian subcontinent, receiving mention in such ancient Hindu literature as the Kalika-Purana and the epic poems, Mahabharata and Ramayana. Formerly recognised as the North East Frontier Agency (from the British colonial era), the region became the Indian union territory of Arunachal Pradesh in 1972, and in 1987 it became an Indian nation. The area, however, has been the topic of an ongoing sovereignty dispute between India and China.
10. Manipur was one of the princely states of British India. After independence, on September 21, 1949, Maharaja Budhachandra signed a Treaty of Accession merging the kingdom into India.
11. Meghalaya was previously part of Assam, but on January 21, 1972, the districts of Khasi, Garo and Jaintia hills became the young state of Meghalaya.
12. A constitution Amendment Bill conferred statehood on Mizoram. The Bill was passed in the Lok Sabha on August 5, 1986. The formalisation of Mizoram State took place on February 20, 1987. Chief Secretary Lalkhama read out the proclamation of statehood at a public meeting organised at Aizawl's Parade Ground. Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi inaugurated the new state and Hiteshwar Saikia was appointed as Governor of Mizoram.
13. After the independence of India in 1947, the area remained a portion of the state of Assam. Nagaland attained statehood with the act of the state of Nagaland Act in 1962 passed by the Indian Parliament on December 1, 1963, and Kohima was declared as the state capital. After elections in January 1964, the first democratically elected Nagaland Legislative Assembly was instituted on February 11, 1964.
14. The region of modern Tripura was ruled for several centuries by the Tripuri dynasty. It was a princely state during British rule, and joined the new independent India in 1949.
15. For details on this refer: A. N. M. Irshad Ali and Indranoshee Das, "Tribal Situation in North East India," *Studies of Tribes and Tribals*, 1(2) (2003): 141-48.
16. The "scheduled tribes" only refer to the tribes listed in the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution, and do not reflect the real complexity of the cultural mosaic of the neighbourhood, which covers over 400 distinct tribal and sub-tribal groupings. It is to be pointed out here that the phrase "tribe" is one of the most contested terms, particularly in India.
17. The 2001 Census has made it more specific on the inclusion of scheduled tribes. It is expressed as in Article 342 which provides for specification of tribes or tribal communities or part of or groups within tribes or tribal communities which are deemed to be for the purposes of the Constitution the scheduled tribes in relation to that of the state or union territory.
18. The treaty was signed on February 24, 1826, nearly two years after the war formally broke out on March 5, 1824, by General Sir Archibald Campbell on the British side, and by Governor of Legaing, Maha Min Hla Kyaw Htin from the Burmese side.
19. Raile Rocky, "Tribes and Tribal Studies in North East: Deconstructing the Philosophy of Colonial Methodology," *Journal of Tribal Intellectual Collective India* (ISSN 2321 5437), vol.1 issue 2, no. 2, December 2013, pp. 25-37.

20. <http://tribal.nic.in/WriteReadData/CMS/Documents/201306110208002203443DemographicStatusofScheduledTribePopulationofIndia.pdf> (Accessed on July 27, 2014).
21. The Lushei, being one of the major tribes of the Mizo people, influenced neighbouring, smaller tribes, such as the Lai/Pawih, the Ralte, the Hmar, the Paite and the Rangte/Gangte.
22. For details on this, see Keihawla Sailo, *Golden History of Lushai Hills* (Aizawl: Synod Press, 2011), pp. 26-27.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 116.
24. *Ibid.*
25. Sharif M. Shuja, "An ethnic Indian quandary: Northeast India—a case study of ethnic provincialism," *Harvard Asia Pacific Review*, 2(2001):55.
26. For details, see http://cdpsindia.org/ne_insurgency.asp (Accessed on July 16, 2014).
27. Subir Bhaumik, 1996, quoting P. N. Banerji, Joint Secretary (East) in the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW), in *Insurgent Crossfire: Northeast India* (New Delhi: Lancer Books: 1996), p. 52.
28. Nirmal Nibedon, *Night of the Guerrillas* (New Delhi: Lancer Books, 1995), p. 90.
29. B. N. Pakem (ed.), quoting the DGMI Status Report 1967 in "External Linkages of Insurgency in Northeast India," in *Insurgency In Northeast India* (New Delhi: Omsons, 1967), p. 934.
30. Near Verbatim Report of the Foreign Minister's Informal Press Briefing to Indian Press Correspondents on April 8, 1966 at 4.00 p.m. at South Block, in Avtar Singh Bhasin, *India-Pakistan Relations: 1947-2007*, Ministry of External Affairs: Government of India, 2012, p. 1154.
31. J. N. Dixit, *Makers of India's Foreign Policy* (New Delhi: HarperCollins Publishers, 2004), p. 131.
32. A detailed account of the Indian sponsorship to the Shanti Bahini rebel force is available in *Insurgent Cross fire: Northeast India*, pp. 245-306.
33. "Bangladesh to hand over Indian separatist in exchange for murder accused." BBC Monitoring South Asia, August 24, 2014.
34. "India: Prospects for India-Bangladesh relations," *Businessline*, 2001, November 08: 1.
35. Subir Bhaumik, "Insurgency in the North East," *Bharat Rakshak Monitor*, vol. 5(2), September-October, 2002.
36. Thongkholal Haokip, "India's Look East Policy," *Third Concept—An International Journal of Ideas*, vol. 25, no. 291, May 2011: p. 7.
37. Ranjit Gupta, "India's 'Look East' Policy" in *Indian Foreign Policy: Challenges and Opportunities*, Foreign Service Institute: New Delhi, 2007: pp. 351-81.
38. Joint Statement issued on the First ASEAN-INDIA Summit held at Phnom Penh, Cambodia, November 5, 2002.
39. "STATES: Meet highlights potential of North-East," *Businessline*, April 12, 2010.
40. Julien Levesque, "Northeast in India's Look East Policy," *Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies*, no. 2558, May 2008, p. 6.